NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
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DAVID LENT/ROME

NEW ANTI-KIDNAPPING TACTIC

ANNCR:

LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES HAVE INTRODUCED A NEW TACTIC TO CONTROL ITALY'S MOST LUCRATIVE ILLEGAL INDUSTRY, KIDNAPPING FOR RANSOM. FROM ROME, VOA'S DAVID LENT SENDS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

KIDNAPPING FOR RANSOM IS, WITHOUT A DOUBT, A FAST GROWTH INDUSTRY IN ITALY. THE RATE OF KIDNAPPING HAS NEARLY DOUBLED EACH YEAR FROM ONLY EIGHT THREE YEARS AGO TO SIXTY LAST YEAR. IT'S A LOW INVESTMENT INDUSTRY AND TILL NOW HAS BEEN LOW-RISK. FEW OF ITALY'S ENTERPRISING KIDNAPPERS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED BY POLICE. AND THE PROFITS ARE ENORMOUS-- KIDNAPPERS LAST YEAR EARNED -- IF THAT IS THE RIGHT WORD FOR IT -- AN ESTIMATED EIGHTY FIVE MILLION DOLLARS. BUT NOW -- AN ENTERPRISING PUBLIC PROSECUTOR APPEARS TO HAVE FOUND A WAY TO CUT INTO THE BURGEONING BUSINESS: CONFISCATE MONEY INTENDED FOR RANSOM PAYMENT.

FERDINANDO POMARICI TURNED UP AN ARTICLE IN THE ITALIAN PENAL CODE WHICH MAKES IT THE DUTY OF JUSTICE AUTHORITIES TO "TAKE NOTE THAT A CRIME IS BEING COMMITTED AND DO ALL THEY CAN TO PREVENT IT." "TAKING NOTE" MEANS ACTIVE INVESTIGATION INCLUDING WIRE TAPS WHICH ARE LEGAL IN KIDNAPPING CASES IN ITALY. MISTER POMARICI BELIEVES PAYMENT OF RANSOM CONTRIBUTES TO COMMISSION OF A CRIME: TO WIT, KIDNAPPING. HE SAYS THIS GIVES HIM LEGAL JUSTIFICATION TO SEIZE INTENDED RANSOM MONEY. SINCE THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR REACHED THIS

DECISION LAST MONTH, POLICE OPERATING UNDER COURT ORDER HAVE SEIZED INTENDED RANSOM MONEY FOUR TIMES. THIS WEEK THEY SEIZED WHAT THEY BELIEVED TO BE A SECOND INTENDED RANSOM PAYMENT DESTINED FOR THE ABDUCTORS OF A MILAN INDUSTRIALIST.

IF THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S NEW ANTI-KIDNAPPING METHOD WORKS, IT COULD EASE A VERY REAL DAILY THREAT TO WELL-TO-DO FAMILIES IN ITALY. SOME FAMILIES HAVE EMPLOYED BODYGUARDS TO ESCORT THE CHILDREN TO SCHOOL AND THE WIFE SHOPPING. OTHERS HAVE SENT THEIR CHILDREN TO SWITZERLAND OR FRANCE. IT IS REPORTED THAT THE KIDNAP RISK WEIGHED HEAVILY IN THE DECISION OF ITALIAN ACTRESS SOPHIA LOREN TO SETTLE IN PARIS WITH HER CHILDREN.

THE NEW ANTI-KIDNAP TACTIC MAY INDEED WORK, BUT IT ALSO RAISES SOME SERIOUS QUESTIONS. IT'S NOT ALWAYS EASY TO PROVE IN COURT THAT THE CONFISCATED MONEY WAS REALLY INTENDED AS A RANSOM PAYMENT. ANOTHER PROBLEM IS THAT THE NEW TECHNIQUE MAY SERVE NOT SO MUCH TO PREVENT KIDNAPPERS CARRYING OUT KIDNAPS, BUT RATHER MAY DISCOURAGE THE FAMILIES OF VICTIMS FROM INFORMING THE POLICE. THIS COULD RESULT IN POLICE SIMPLY NOT KNOWING OF A KIDNAPPING AND THUS AN EASIER, NOT MORE DIFFICULT JOB FOR THE KIDNAPPERS. AND EVEN MORE SERIOUS, PERHAPS, IS THE QUESTION OF WHAT HAPPENS TO THE KIDNAPPED VICTIM AFTER THE MONEY TO BE USED FOR RANSOM HAS BEEN CONFISCATED? THE MURDER OF ONE PROMINENT KIDNAP VICTIM COULD MAKE IT VERY DIFFICULT INDEED FOR AUTHORITIES TO PURSUE A POLICY OF CONFISCATION.

BRT/PY